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**Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

American Experience: The Triangle Fire (2011)

The film depicts an epic clash between workers who fought for unionization and better working conditions, and bosses who fought equally hard to keep their factories free of unions and regulation. While watching the film, make note of arguments on both sides of this debate.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Arguments for the Workers | Arguments for the Employers |
|  |  |

1. Which of these arguments do you consider most persuasive?
2. What caused public opinion to shift from favoring the factory owners' arguments to supporting workers' demands for workplace regulation?

**The Immigrant Experience**

**Dreams versus realities.**

1. What brought these immigrants to America, and what motivated them to work such long hours?
2. How did the realities of their working lives contrast with their dreams and their observations of promise and opportunity in America?

**From rags to riches.**

1. What did Max Blanck and Isaac Harris have in common with the women who worked for them at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory?
2. How did their story embody the American Dream?

**Inside the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory**

**"A plum job."**

1. Why was working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory a desirable job?
2. Describe the factory environment. In what ways was it modern?

**Conditions at the Triangle factory.**

1. What was a typical day like for workers at the Triangle factory?
2. In what ways was this workplace dangerous?
3. For what reasons did bosses dock workers' pay?

**The price of competition.**

1. What forms of competition did Blanck and Harris face?
2. Why did the Triangle owners keep the factory's Washington Place exit locked?

**Demanding a Union**

**Envisioning change.**

1. What changes were shirtwaist workers agitating for when they made the decision to go out on strike?
2. Why did factory owners like Harris and Blanck see unionization as a threat and as a personal attack?
3. In your opinion, were the workers' demands reasonable? Were the factory owners justified in resisting these demands?

**A daring idea.**

1. Why was an industry-wide strike unthinkable before the shirtwaist workers gathered in November 1909 and heard Clara Lemlich's speech?
2. In your opinion, should the strikers have softened their demands when owners offered some concessions? Discuss or debate.

**"The mink brigade."**

1. Why was Anne Morgan's support and that of the so-called mink brigade "amazing, shocking, and exciting," in the words of historian David von Drehle?
2. How did Morgan's involvement affect media interest in the strike and police treatment of the striking workers?

**The Fire and Its Aftermath**

**Causes of the Triangle fire.**

1. What caused the fire that broke out at the Triangle factory on March 25, 1911?
2. Who escaped? Who did not escape?

J**ustice denied?**

1. What was the outcome of the manslaughter case against Blanck and Harris?
2. In your view, was justice served? Should Blanck and Harris have been held legally responsible for the deaths of the Triangle workers? Discuss.

**Legacy of a deadly blaze.**

1. What concrete changes did the government institute to make workplaces safer for factory workers?
2. What did Samuel Gompers mean when he said that women had to burn in order to spur government action on labor safety?

Imagine that you are a government official on the Factory Commission established by the city to deal with the public outcry following this tragedy.  You have been called upon to propose legislation that will prevent another such tragedy from occurring in the future.  Compile a list of at least four reforms you would recommend to the State Legislature to enact.

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